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Program Saves Ratepayers Over \$1 million

Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore. BPA's Crime Witness program, barely a year old, already has saved ratepayers over one million dollars. Increased public participation in the neighborhood watch-style program is credited with the savings.

"Ratepayers have been very helpful by reporting vandalism, theft, damages, and fraud," says Mike Berg, Senior Security Specialist.

Since the program began, citizen tips have paid off 104 times, eight of which led to arrests. Cash rewards of up to \$1,000 are paid for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons committing crimes against BPA. Names of witnesses and reward amounts are kept confidential.

"This is BPA's experiment in community policing," says Berg, "We are enlisting the eyes and ears of the ratepayers in a joint venture in crime and cost reduction."

In the past, BPA has spent over one million dollars a year on crimes committed against BPA property, primarily transmission facilities. In an effort to curb these infractions, BPA created the Crime Witness Program - an aggressive, region-wide, neighborhood watch-style crime deterrence program. Anyone who sees or suspects a crime to the BPA transmission system, property or personnel is encouraged to report it by calling 1-800-437-2744.

The most common crime committed against BPA's system is gunshot vandalism to insulators on transmission poles. BPA spends almost \$500,000 every year to replace damaged insulators. An afternoon shooting spree at a single site can result in \$15,000 or more in damage to insulators. Vandalizing electrical facilities jeopardizes human lives.

Downed lines can cause fires and lethal ground voltages can kill or seriously injure people. This also threatens the reliable, safe operation of the power system. Fire departments, police and hospitals all depend upon a reliable supply of electricity to be able to respond to emergencies. When vandals manage to put a line out of service, it's not "harmless" horseplay, according to Berg.

The most expensive crime committed is theft, especially metals theft. Copper, brass, and aluminum are popular due to their high resale value on the scrap market.

"A less tangible, but very positive spin-off from the program has been improved networking with other utilities, land owners, land managers, local law enforcement agencies, county health districts, and citizen

interest groups (i.e. SOLV) that are similarly focusing attention on reducing vandalism and illegal dumping," says Berg, "Through informal information exchange and communication, BPA is moving toward community policing on a regional scale."

Anyone witnessing crimes to BPA property is urged to call the toll-free hotline, which is staffed 24 hours a day, at 1-800-437-2744.

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For more information, contact BPA Media Relations, 503-230-5131.